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ABSTRACT

Since principals play an important role in fostering effective educational programs, they have a genuine need for increased professional development opportunities. Five models for administrator inservice education are described, including courses for academic credit, workshops and seminars (institutes) sponsored by professional associations or state education agencies, organized inservice programs, and informal networking. Little is known about administrators' actual participation in these activities or the value attached to each approach. This paper describes a recent study in which principals evaluated their inservice learning experiences. Survey questionnaires were sent to a random sample of elementary and secondary principals in a midwestern state. The response rate was 77 percent. The most frequently used administrator inservice model was the short-term institute sponsored by a professional association. However, principals viewed networking as the most effective all-around approach to inservice education. They also appreciated variety. These findings suggest a need for numerous improvements in designing and implementing professional development programs. Certainly, additional networking opportunities need to be provided, particularly those stressing collegiality, practicality, and administrators' own contributions. (MLH)

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PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE QUALITY OF ALTERNATIVE ADMINISTRATIVE INSERVICE MODELS

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PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE QUALITY OF ALTERNATIVE ADMINISTRATIVE INSERVICE MODELS

In a recent review of the school principalship, Barth (1986) noted that, happily, the role of the principal has enjoyed a "re-discovery." This popular acceptance of the notion that school principals indeed play an important role in fostering more effective educational programs has also led to an understanding that building administrators have a genuine need for more effective approaches to continuing professional development. In short, it is increasingly understood that providing inservice education for administrators cannot be viewed as some sort of "frill," and that quality programs require an investment of time and thought for preparation.

There are numerous opportunities and programs currently available for administrator inservice and professional development. In an earlier review, Daresh and LaPlant (1983) identified five generic models that are normally utilized for the delivery of administrator inservice. The first is the traditional model, consisting of credit courses offered by colleges and universities. Next, there are workshops, seminars, and other similar short-term learning programs sponsored by professional associations, and these have been described and defined more broadly as "institutes." A third model is virtually the same as this second institute approach, with the difference being that sponsorship is from a state education agency. A fourth model is represented by inservice that is provided systematically within a local school district or school through organized courses. This strategy has been given the title of the inservice academy. Finally, administrators also frequently engage in informal networking as a way to continue their personal and professional development.

While the descriptions of these models may be useful in providing some common terms and clarity regarding inservice that is typically available for school leaders, little is known about the extent to which principals

and other administrators actually take advantage of these opportunities, or the value that is attached to each alternative approach by participants. In addition, there is a real need to learn more about the specific objectives that are sought by principals who engage in one or more of the models.

Objectives

The specific objectives of this paper are to, first, describe a recent study of principals' evaluations and perceptions of the quality of their inservice learning experiences which made use of one or more of the identified alternative delivery models for administrator inservice. Second, some of the major findings of the study are summarized. Finally, a series of implications are suggested as they were derived from the study. These implications concern the design of inservice and continuing professional development opportunities that are available to practicing school principals.

Methodology

A survey questionnaire was developed for use in this study and consisted of two parts. The first part sought information concerning background characteristics of respondents, their schools, and districts. The second part consisted of a series of questions that asked respondents to indicate which, if any, model of administrator inservice that they had followed during the past two years, and the grade that would be assigned (A, B, C, D, or F) to each of the models according to the success that a model had in meeting three criteria of effective inservice design identified in the literature (Lawrence, 1974; Daresh & LaPlant, 1984; McComas, 1985). These three criteria consisted on the extent to which a particular model provided opportunity for participant input into the design of activities, the likelihood that a model would allow for two-way communication between inservice providers and inservice participants, and finally, the perceived effectiveness of the inservice model in terms of helping an administrator to carry out his or her daily activities with

practical help. Respondents were also asked to indicate the primary purpose that they had in selecting a particular model.

Survey questionnaires were sent to a random sample of elementary and secondary school principals in a midwestern state. Two hundred and fifty questionnaires were distributed, and 192 were completed and returned (77%). Simple descriptive statistics were computed to provide the findings listed in this paper.

Findings

The major findings related to principals' perceptions of alternative models utilized in the delivery of administrator inservice include the following:

1. **The most frequently-utilized model of administrator inservice, as described by the principals in this study, was the short-term institute sponsored by a professional association.**

As the information provided in Table I indicates, 89.1% of the 192 principals who responded to this survey indicated that they had participated in at least one short-term institute sponsored by a professional association during the past two years. This may not be terribly surprising in view of the fact that there are so many opportunities available for such activities throughout the year. Few school administrators are able to go more than a day or two without receiving some information regarding workshops, institutes, or seminars that are sponsored by either a state or national organization such as the National Academy of School Executives (NASE), the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD). One thing that may have been interesting to determine is whether principals tended to participate mostly in the activities of the national associations or their state and local affiliates.

TABLE I HERE

As Table I also indicates, the least popular, or least frequently-utilized, model for the delivery of administrator inservice was the traditional university course, with only 60.9% of the respondents participating during the past two years. The explanation for this finding is somewhat more difficult to derive from the findings. Two conclusions might be suggested, however, and might be verified or rejected through further investigations. One might be that principals do not simply view university courses as viable inservice learning activities. Presumably, school administrators have had considerable exposure to traditional coursework while engaged in their preservice preparation programs. The use of university courses as a source of continuing professional development might then not be seen as realistic activity. If this is indeed the case, one might find that university courses would fare even more poorly if one would understand that in the state used in this study, there is a requirement of the state department of education which requires administrators (and all educational personnel) to return to complete a specified amount of graduate level course work as part of the credential reneval process. If further data had been collected to indicate the frequency with which principals selected various inservice models purely by choice, the record concerning university courses may have been much worse.

On the other hand, another possible explanation concerning the relative lack of participation by principals in university courses might have been that, at least in the state examined in this study, opportunities for university participation are limited because some areas of the state do not have easy access to universities. In addition, even when college and university programs were nearby, course offerings may not have been sufficiently diverse to meet the perceived inservice needs of practicing school administrators.

INSERVICE MODEL	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	% OF PARTICIPANTS
1. Traditional	119	61.4
2. Professional Association Institutes	171	89.1
3. State Education Agency Institutes	137	72.1
4. Academies	164	85.9
5. Networking	117	60.9

TABLE I. Number and percentage of principals participating in each of the five models of administrative inservice. (Total N = 192).

2. **The model of delivery of administrator inservice described as networking was viewed as the most effective all-around approach by the principals in this study.**

In terms of respondents' ratings of the effectiveness of each model, the most effective model in terms of providing for participant input into the design of programs and activities was networking, and the least effective model according to this criterion was the state education agency-sponsored institute. The most effective model in terms of encouraging two-way communication among inservice participants was also the network, and the least effective model was also the institute sponsored by the state education agency. Finally, the approach described as most effective in helping administrators perform their daily responsibilities was also networking, while traditional university courses were viewed as least effective in this regard (See Table II).

TABLE II HERE

The use of networking is based on the desire of individuals who share common concerns, problems, and potential solutions to those problems to come together periodically to discuss matters of mutual concern. It is probably not terribly surprising, therefore, that this model for administrator inservice would be perceived so positively by practitioners. Nothing in the networking approach suggests that someone tells people what to do, how to do it, or when to do it; it is based on the concept of support and assistance. On the other hand, the models which received a much lower rating from practitioners, namely the state education agency-sponsored institute and the university class, include a much more prescriptive dimension. What this apparently says is that practitioners value more highly those situations where they can engage in their own

MODELS	RATINGS INPUT	TWO-WAY	EFFECTIVENESS
1. Traditional	2.15	2.99	2.49
2. Professional Association Institutes	2.40	2.94	3.01
3. State Education Agency Institutes	1.94	2.54	2.70
4. Academies	2.81	3.13	2.78
5. Networking	2.96	3.34	3.06

TABLE II. Principals' mean score ratings of each of the five models of administrative inservice, relative to the criteria of input into selection of inservice objectives, amount of two-way communication between inservice providers and participants, and perception of the effectiveness of models in helping principals carry out daily responsibilities. (Range=1.0-4.0).

problem solving, without someone else suggesting (or dictating) the one right way to do things.

3. Each of the administrator inservice models addressed different specific goals for participants.

The most popular reason for administrators taking university courses was to meet state certification requirements. Gaining specific information or developing particular job-related skills was given as the primary goal of principals who participated in institutes and academies. No distinction was made in this case between institutes that were sponsored by professional associations or those promoted by state education agencies; principals went to these activities to learn a specific piece of information. Finally, the opportunity to interact with professional peers was indicated as the most popular reason for people to engage in networking.

Implications and Discussion

Inservice opportunities for school administrators are widely used and apparently readily available for practitioners. Based on the findings of this study, however, there are a number of different suggestions regarding possible improvement of these opportunities.

First, the findings of this study indicate that administrators participate in a wide variety of inservice activities. Not one single respondent indicated that he or she did not engage in some kind of professional development activity during the past two years. In fact, most respondents indicated that they participated in several different models of administrator inservice. There is a clear ongoing need for professional school administrators to have opportunities for inservice education. As a result, more rather than less opportunity for inservice on a regular basis for administrators is warranted.

Second, ongoing attention to the ways in which school principals as inservice participants may be included in planning the design of inservice, engaging in two-way communication, and gaining insights and relevant

information regarding immediate and daily administrative tasks needs to be promoted. There has been a rich and consistent set of findings well-developed in the research and literature base related to the general design and implementation of inservice in schools. There is little doubt, given the enormous number of surveys conducted in recent years and related to inservice participants' needs, that people want to have a voice in the design and implementation of learning activities. Also, people want inservice that addresses immediate needs. These observations are well-founded and cannot be ignored by those who plan inservice for school administrators. Regardless of the individual model used to deliver inservice to school principals, designers and planners cannot ignore the basic realities of effective inservice design. To ignore these features almost guarantees a continuing negative appraisal of professional development and continuing education for school administrators.

Third, the findings of this study show that practitioners clearly believe that some models for inservice are simply not very effective. Institutes, particularly those sponsored by state education agencies, are apparently in need of considerable improvement. Perhaps another suggestion might be that state departments of education, often viewed in negative terms by practitioners because of their historic regulatory functions, are not organizations that should attempt to engage as providers of inservice for administrators. There is not sufficient data in this study to provide an absolute answer, but two alternative observations may be possible to make here. For one thing, principals might be saying that state departments have a legitimate role in providing inservice, but what they do is poorly conducted. On the other hand, principals may be saying that state departments should get out of the inservice business entirely. This second observation would no doubt be ignored by those state education officials who would like to see their agencies assume a more proactive role in providing leadership to the school personnel in their states.

Finally, the single most obvious finding from this study is that principals like to work with their colleagues in networking arrangements. As a result, additional opportunities for networking need to be provided, particularly as those types of opportunities may be used to foster increased feelings of collegiality among administrators. Isolation on the

job is one of the most damaging problems faced by professional educators--teachers, administrators, and all personnel who work in schools. The development of, support for, and refinement of networks for school principals may be an important way to change the norm of separation that characterizes much of what goes on in schools.

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